

The Rights of Innocence

by Kristen Elizabeth

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Summary: Happiness comes in many shapes and forms, not all of them easily recognizable. Set in Season One--for those of us who knew and loved Doyle.

The Rights of Innocence

Disclaimer: Angel and Co do not belong to me and I take no credit for them. I do however plan to take full credit for Bridget and Allen because it was my grey matter that thought them up:)

>
Author's Notes: This story is set right after "The Prodigal" and "The Ring".

>
Dedication: To my mother, without whom I would be lost. And for Rob, for reminding me that Doyle was half-demon. Lol:)

>
Right of Innocence

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>"Cordelia", Angel appeared in the doorway from his private office. He looked up from the file in his hands when he got no reply.

Cordelia's desk was empty. "Um...Wesley?"

>The former Watcher was sitting in a chair, poring over an ancient volume of poetry. He glanced up, guiltily, as though he had been caught slacking off. "Yes?"

>Angel pointed to the desk. "Where's Cordelia?"

>"Ladies room", Wesley replied. "May I help you with something?"

>"It's just a filing thing. Cordelia's territory." Angel plopped the file down and sat on the desk's edge. "Could things get any slower around here?", he sighed.

>"You don't consider last week's super slimy sewer monster exciting?" Cordelia appeared from the bathroom. "Cause I can live my whole life in the slow lane if that's the alternative."

>Angel stood up to let her sit down at the desk. "Before this...lull, you were averaging what? Two or three visions a week? And this week...nothing."

>Cordelia picked up the file and stuck it under a pile of papers.

"Hmm...good to know that my boss is wishing skull-splitting pain for me." Angel gave her a look. "Maybe I'm broken."

>"Or perhaps things are simply right with the world", Wesley commented.

>Angel shook his head. "I don't buy that."

>"You know what your problem is Angel?" Cordelia pointed her pen at him, accusingly. "You're too cynical. Doom and gloom and nothing else."

>Wesley turned a page in his book. "That could have something do with his being a soul cursed vampire."

>"Not an excuse", Cordelia wagged the pen.

>"So what do you suggest I do? A walk in the park?"

>Cordelia stood up. "See, I've been thinking about it and I've come to one conclusion." She pulled a brochure from her desk drawer. "Dance lessons."

>Angel blinked. "Please tell me you're kidding."

>"Okay, but I'd be lying. C'mon Angel...just look at it. It's about meeting people, getting out, having fun. In case you've forgotten, fun is..."

>"Cordelia...I appreciate what you're trying to do. But in all honesty...." He was cut off as the front door of the office opened suddenly. Angel stepped back to avoid the light.

>A young woman stood in the doorway, supporting a small child on her hip. She smiled nervously. "Um...hello. Is this...." She fumbled in her pocket for a slip of paper. "Angel Investigations?"

>Angel's attention was caught soon as she spoke; her accent was decidedly Irish. "Yes, you've come to the right place. Will you come in?"

>She smiled nervously. Wesley jumped up to offer her his seat. "Thank you", she said, sitting. The child, a little boy, clung to her neck.

>"I'm Angel. These are my associates, Cordelia Chase and Wesley Wyndham-Pryce. What can we do for you, Miss...." Angel trailed off.

>"Roche. Bridget Roche." She set down the duffel back that was slung over one shoulder. "I'm looking for someone."

>"Oh, well, we don't really do the Search America thing", Cordelia spoke up. "But if you like, we can recommend..."

>"Cordelia", Angel stopped her. "Please...go on", he prompted Bridget.

>The woman shifted the boy on her lap. "I was told that I could find Francis here."

>"Francis", Angel said, softly.

>"Francis Doyle. Does he still work here?" Bridget looked up at Angel; he found he couldn't return the glance. Her eyes...they were too hope-filled.

>"Oh god", Cordelia covered her mouth. "Are you like...his sister or something?"

>Bridget blushed. "No, I'm not family. I just need to speak to him."

>Angel looked down at his shoes. "Miss Roche...", he began.

>"Oh please call me Bridget."

>"Bridget", he continued. "There's something I have to tell you....and it's not going to be easy."

>"Something about Francis?"

>Angel nodded. "He....he died....awhile back."

>There was a long silence. The only sound in the room was the cling of metal against metal as the little boy played with the necklaces around Bridget's neck. "Francis is....dead?"

>"I'm...very sorry you had to find out like this."

>Bridget's eyes darted around, filling with tears. "He can't...he can't be...dead. No...." Her whole frame shook as sobs welled up. "Oh please no!!!" She buried her face in the little boy's shoulder.

>Angel looked up at the ceiling, rapidly blinking back his own tears. He could imagine, all too well, what this girl was going through. He thought that the pain of Doyle's death was over. Now, it was like he had to relive it all over again. "Is there anything we can do for you?"

>She pulled away from the child's body. "I can't believe...he's gone. He's gone and he never got to meet..." Bridget stopped, the tears streaking down her face.

>"He never got to meet who?", Wesley asked, quietly.

>Bridget bit her lip. "Oh god. He never got to meet Allen. His son."

>Angel and Cordelia exchanged a quick, shocked look. "His son? This is Doyle's...son?" Angel looked at the boy in Bridget's arms.

>"Doyle had a son...and he never told us?" Cordelia's brow furrowed. She looked as though she were going to say more, but Angel silenced her with a glance.

>"Well, he didn't know", Bridget said. A few more tears rolled down her cheeks. "I've been trying to get to America for two years...to come here and tell him. And now...I can't. How did this happen?"

>Angel looked at his hands. "It's a very long story. But he went...quickly. There's some comfort in that."

>Bridget nodded. "We didn't have a lot of time together." Her face crumpled. "I really loved him though." Cordelia pulled a box of tissues from her bottom drawer and offered them to Bridget, but not before taking one for herself. "Thanks." The girl wiped at her eyes. "I'm so sorry for breaking down like this."

>"Nothing to be sorry for", Wesley assured her.

>"I just don't know what to do now. I'm here.....and now, I don't know what to do." Her son made a grab for her hair. "Allen...don't, baby."

>"Did you just arrive in town?", Angel inquired.

>Before she could answer, a spasm of coughing hit her. It lasted for a minute. "May I get you some water, Miss Roche", Wesley asked, heading for the mini-fridge. She nodded and continued to cough as Wesley poured her a cup.

>"Are you all right?" Cordelia's voice was concerned.

>Bridget swallowed some water. "Actually....I'm not. I didn't come here just to introduce Doyle to his son. I was going to give Allen to him." She paused, stroking Allen's fine black baby curls. "You see....I have cancer. I'm dying."

>Another long pause settled over the room. Angel crossed his arms tightly over his chest. "I'm...we're...very sorry, Bridget."

>"I have maybe two months left. I came here to make sure Allen will be taken care of." She looked at her son and fresh tears appeared. "He doesn't understand any of this. All he knows is that we were going on a trip to America."

>"Bridget", Angel knelt next to the young woman. "You should be in a hospital. There are things the doctors can do. Surgeries, chemotherapy..."

>She shook her head sadly. "I've tried chemo. It made me so sick. I couldn't take care of Allen."

>"But surely your family back in Ireland helped...", Wesley began.

>"I don't have any family. Not any who care anyways. And my friends couldn't take Allen; they have families of their own."

>"Mummy", Allen whispered. "I have to go potty."

>Bridget smiled at him. "Good boy." She looked at Angel. "May we use the bathroom?"

>"Of course", Angel pointed to the door. "Right through there."

Bridget stood, took Allen's little hand and led him into the small room. The door shut behind them.

>Cordelia let out a pent up breath. "Wow. This afternoon has turned into the biggest downer *ever*!"

>"Poor girl", Wesley shook his head. "I wish there was some way to help her."

>Angel paced for a moment. "There is."

>Wesley looked at him, curiously. "What do you suggest?"

>"I take them in."

>Cordelia looked at him blankly. "Angel...I feel really bad for her too. But you can't just take in every dying girl who shows up at the office with Doyle's children."

>"We can't just let her walk out of here, leave her to fend for herself on the streets of L.A., Cordelia. She's sick and she's dying."

>"We could get her a motel room."

>Angel shook his head. "She came here for help. I'm going to help her. That's Doyle's son in there. We owe it to him."

>"How do we really know that it's Doyle's son? Are we suddenly taking everything everyone says at face value?"

>Angel frowned. "Cordelia, I can't believe you would even think that she's lying about this."

>"If I may toss my two cents in here", Wesley interrupted. "While I certainly cannot fathom sending a dying woman with a small child out into a strange country on her own with no support of any kind, I think you should seriously consider this, Angel. Taking care of a terminally ill patient is time consuming and intimate on levels that are hard to describe. And your lifestyle...your secrets...you won't be able to keep them from her."

>"A moment ago, being a vampire wasn't an excuse to not go out dancing. Now it is an excuse to not help someone in need?"

>"That's not what he's saying, Angel", Cordelia said. "Actually...I have no idea what he's trying to say, but I agree with him. Think this through before you do it."

>Angel lifted his shoulders. "I've already thought it through. I'm going to ask Bridget to stay with me."

>"Angel...", Wesley began.

>"My mind is made up", Angel cut him off. "I had to watch Doyle die, unable to do anything for him. The least I can do is take care of his son."

>Cordelia spoke softly, "While watching his mother die, unable to do anything for her?"

>The door to the bathroom opened. Bridget reappeared in the office, Allen in tow. "Well", she said. "I suppose I'll be going now." She picked up her bag. "Thank you for..."

>Angel stopped her. "Bridget....I'd like you and your son to stay here with me."

>Bridget looked surprised. "Here? In your office?"

>"No...no, my apartment is just below the office. There's more than enough room."

>"Mr. Angel, I appreciate this very much. But I couldn't burden you with..."

>"You wouldn't be a burden."

>She smiled weakly. "A dying stranger and her four year old son wouldn't be a burden for a thirty year old private investigator?"

>"Appearances are decieving. I want to help you. Doyle was...he was very special. To us."

>Bridget's eyes watered again. "He was." She looked at her son for a moment. "All right. We accept your kind offer. But only until other arrangements can be made."

>"That's fine." Angel smiled. "Come on...you can get settled in right away." He reached out his hand for her bag.

>She shyly handed it to him. "Thank you."

>Cordelia and Wesley watched Angel lead Bridget and Allen to the elevator. Once they were out of sight, Cordelia shook her head. "You've got to give him snaps in the good deeds department."

>"Angel cares about people." Wesley crossed his arms. "He's a good man. Rash and impulsive, but a good man."

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>"And here's the bedroom. I wish there was more light, but..."

>"We're underground, aren't we?", Bridget said. "Not that I'm complaining...it's a lovely flat."

>Angel stuck his hands in the pockets of his black pants. "I hope you'll be...comfortable here."

>"I know we will be. I really can't thank you enough, Mr. Angel...." The sound of tiny feet running across the wood floor came from the living room. "Allen...don't run", she called to her son. "Come here, darlin'."

>"It's just Angel", he corrected her.

>Allen appeared in the door way, a sheepish grin on his pudgy little face. "Mummy...I'm hungry."

>"Oh...let me fix you two something to eat. I didn't even think...." Angel made his way to the kitchen.

>"Are you sure it's not too much bother...Angel?", Bridget worried.

>Angel opened his fridge, grabbed a few eggs and closed the door quickly before Bridget could see his blood supply. "No bother at all. Now that you'll be living here, I want you to feel free to use anything. The kitchen, the TV, everything. All right?" He pulled a bowl from a cabinet and started cracking the eggs into it, making a mental note to find a new place for his blood.

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>"Is he sleeping?" Angel approached Bridget from behind. Looking over her shoulder, he saw Allen's little body curled up in his big bed.

>He could sense Bridget smile. "He just nodded off." She turned around to look at him. "Usually, he's very good about it but with all the excitement of a new place...." She laughed. "He's being a little demon."

>"A demon...", Angel trailed off. "Bridget...how well did you know Doyle...um, Francis?"

>She sighed. "I know what you're thinking. You probably know that Francis was married. But, they weren't together when...we were together. They were going through a very bad period. He came to Ireland to....get away from it all."

>"How did you meet? If you want to talk about it, I mean."

>Bridget walked past him, heading for the couch. She slowly sat down. "It was...almost five years ago. I had just moved to Belfast from the country and I was working at a pub. One day, Francis came in. He was only in the country for a few weeks...but they were a good few weeks." She looked down at her lap; Angel thought he saw a tear fall. "You know, he wanted me to come back to America with him. But I didn't want to just pick up and leave Ireland. It was my home."

>"You didn't write him or try to contact him after that?" Angel sat across from her on an armchair.

>"I wanted to....when I found out I was pregnant. But somehow..." She brushed under her eyes with the back of her hand. "It seemed the sort of thing that one ought to tell in person. And I didn't have enough money to leave Ireland until now."

>There was a pause. "When did you find out about the cancer?"

>"Two years ago. That's when I began to try to save up...to get here. My doctors were hopeful...said I could overcome it if I just rested, went through chemo..." She swallowed. "But I had a feeling that...it wouldn't do any good, even I could have done it."

>"Bridget..."

>"I'm only 24 years old, Angel. I don't want to die, but I've accepted it." She smiled through her tears. "Jesus, Mary and Joseph....you must think that all I do is cry all day."

>Angel crossed his arms. "You're...handling things much better than...than most people your age would."

>"I haven't really had a choice. It's been me, by myself." She stood up and looked towards the bedroom. "Until Allen came along. The best day of my life. Well, the happiest at least. No, I don't fear dying when I've had a day like that."

>"What happens to Allen after...." Angel was cut off by the sound of heavy footsteps on the stairs. Cordelia and Wesley appeared, out of breath. "What's going on?", he asked, jumping to his feet.

>Wesley struggled for breath. "Cordelia had a vi....headache. A...a splitting headache. Isn't that right, Cordelia?"

>"It was a really *bad* one, Angel", she emphasized, putting a hand to her forehead. "I think I need some *aspirin*."

>Angel caught on immediately. "Um....all right. Let's go get you that aspirin. From the drugstore...since we don't have any here." He reached for his coat, draped across a chair and put it on. "Bridget, are you going to be all right?"

>She smiled, slightly confused. "I think I'll go to bed too. Thanks though." She watched the trio quickly head out of the apartment before turning and walking back to the bedroom.

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>Angel quietly let himself into his apartment, as not to wake his houseguests. It was well past midnight; the Trea 'lion demon Cordelia had seen attacking a young girl had been a particularly hard one to fell. He gingerly took off his coat; the demon had sliced his arm with one claw. Pulling off his shirt, he could see that the wound had already begun to close.

>A nawing in his stomach told him that he was long past hungry. Balling up his shirt in one hand, he headed into the kitchen for a bag of blood. It was dark; Bridget must have turned the lights out before she fell asleep. Angel fumbled for the switch. When the room filled with light, he was startled to see Bridget sitting at the kitchen table. Before he could say anything, she spoke.

>"What's wrong with you?"

>"What?", he asked although he had already guessed.

>She slowly stood up; he could see dark circles under her eyes. "I was thirsty, so I looked in the icebox for some juice." Her glance met his. "Are you sick, too? Do you need blood for some sort of...homemade transfusion?"

>Angel began to put his shirt back on. "I can explain, Bridget, but it might be very difficult for you to believe."

>"Just don't tell me that you do something else...with the blood." She put a hand to her stomach.

>He paused. "You don't look very well, Bridget. Can I get you something..."

>"I'm all right. I'd just like to know what kind of man my son and I are staying with."

>Angel put his hands on his hips. "In plain and simple terms....I'm a vampire."

>Bridget gave him a blank look. "What?"

>"Please, don't worry. I cannot, nor do I wish to hurt you or your son. I'm not evil."

>"You're a vampire? But...that's ridiculous. Vampires are made up stories...things in the kind of movies Allen will want to see in about five years." Bridget's hand moved up to her throat. "I'm right, aren't I?"

>Angel shook his head. "I'm...vampires real. Cordelia didn't have a headache tonight; we went to fight a demon. That's what I do. I help people by fighting other creatures."

>"So, your associates....Francis knew about you." She swallowed. "How did he die? Was it one of your demons?"

>"He was killed by something that a species of demon created to destroy his people."

>Bridget frowned. "His people? The Irish?"

>Realizing what he had just done, Angel sighed. "Doyle wasn't....completely human, Bridget. His father was a Bracken demon." He reached out to touch her arm. "He could have told you, but really, there wasn't any reason for you to know."

>She backed away from him. "I don't believe you. Francis cared about me. He wasn't bad at all. He was good and...and kind and sweet...."

>"And half demon." Angel reached out again, but once more she moved out of the way. "This is a lot to take in and you look....well, you look exhausted. Why don't you sleep and in the morning, we'll...."

>"No." She took a deep breath. "I want to understand all of this. I want to know why there are these evil things in the world....why you have to fight them if you're one of them...." Her words faltered. "...why Francis had to die."

>"Big questions."

>"I need to know."

>Angel sat down at the table and thought for a long moment. "What do you want to hear? The world has been this way since the dawn of time. Demons, vampires, werewolves...everything you fear; they're here. You usually don't know about them until it's too late." He paused. "But, it's not hopeless. There are people who spend their lives trying to even the score. Slayers, Watchers, demon hunters....and me."

>"Why you?"

>"I have a soul. And I can."

>Bridget slid into the chair across from him. "Was Francis killed by a demon hunter?"

>"No. You were right; Doyle was good. There are some demons who are. Most aren't, though. He was killed by a kind that weren't."

>"And you...you couldn't stop it? You couldn't fight them....save the day? Save Francis?"

>Angel balled his fist tightly; his nails dug into his palm. "No. I couldn't."

>They sat in silence for a few minutes. "Have you seen a lot of people....die, Angel?"

>He let out a bitter chuckle. "More than my fair share."

>"Good. When I die, you'll know what to do." She stood up again.

"Goodnight Angel."

>"Wait!", he said to her retreating figure. She turned around. "You still want to stay here? Even now that you know everything?"

>She looked at him for a long moment. "There are evil things in the world. And you fight evil things. I can't think of a safer place for me and my son to be."

>"But....I'm not infallible. I didn't keep Doyle safe."

>Bridget approached him. It was the closest they had been since meeting; he could actually feel the sickness in the blood that coursed through her small body. "Do you blame yourself for his death?"

>He looked down at the table. Her question had thrown him. It was something he had never actually asked himself, lest he find out the answer. "I....I suppose I do."

>"Why did you really ask us to stay with you?" He didn't reply. "Was it to lessen your guilt?", she continued.

>Angel's head shot up. "No....I...." He stopped. "You're a very perceptive woman."

>She bent down slightly. He felt her dry lips on his hairline.

"Whatever made you do it, thank you, Angel." She straightened and smiled at him. "My angelic vampire."

>Angel sat at the table long after she left the room.

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>A knock at his office door drew Lindsey McDonald's attention away from the paperwork in front of him. His brow crinkled in frustration. The hour was late; he had thought he had the building to himself. Someone wanting to see him right then couldn't be good. "Come in", he called out, looking back down at his work.

>He knew who it was before he even glanced back up. Her perfume filled the spacious office; the demanding scent of roses with an undertone of lavender clung to his nostrils and filled his brain. "This had better be good", he warned her as he continued to scribble notes.

>Lilah Morgan stealthily slid into one of the chairs that sat before his desk. "I can't promise good, but I can promise that you really want to know this. Now."

>Lindsey sighed, set his pen down and looked up at his colleague. "If it has anything to do with a certain vampiric private investigator, I really don't want to know without being far drunker than the liquor in this office would let me get."

>"Might as well get halfway there then." Lilah pointed to his brandy snifter. "He killed Chuangtom."

>There was silence in the office for a minute. Then, with one angry swipe, Lindsey stood up and knocked his paperwork off the desk. "Damn him!!"

>When the papers had settled, Lilah folded her hands in her lap.

"He's already damned, remember?"

>Lindsey loosened his tie, one hand on his hip. "The Treason's are not going to be pleased."

>"To say the very least. Chuangtom was next in line for Chancellor, you know. And it was our responsibility to defend him."

>"Legally, not physically. And 'our' responsibility? The last time I checked, they were your clients."

>Lilah stood up angrily. "They are clients of Wolfram and Hart. I am one of several lawyers who represent them, a group you yourself belong to and I am not, I repeat, *not* taking the fall for this", she hissed.

>"So, what do we do about it?"

>Regaining her composure, she replied, "Nothing. For now."

>Lindsey sat back down in his chair. "You must have gotten an early start on the drinking."

>"Trust me on this, Lindsey. This is not a time to just rush into things." She came around to his side of the desk. "Experience tells us that by biding our time, the perfect solution at the perfect time will eventually present itself."

>"It had better. We don't have time for this crap."

>Lilah sat on the desk's edge, her silk and linen covered chest inches away from his head. "Like I said, trust me." Bending her head slightly, she leaned in until they were face to face.

>"I don't trust anyone. And neither do you." He let his fingers touch her knee.

>She shrugged, standing up suddenly. "Good point." She walked out of his office, but the deadly scent of roses stayed long after she was gone.

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>"What is it, Dr. Pressman?" Angel looked down at the aging doctor, the only one in the phonebook who made housecalls.

>Dr. Pressman sighed and stuffed his stethoscope into his medical bag. "The cancer has spread. I can't tell exactly without a lot of testing, but I believe it's gone to her lungs. She'll be gone very soon. I'd say within the next twenty-four hours."

>Angel's mind spun and his knees threatened to give out from underneath him. He felt Cordelia's hand on his arm, like bridge back to reality. It was a place he didn't want to be, a place where Bridget lay in his bed, dying from the cancer cells that were rapidly overpowering her small body. His next words were choked. "But....she was supposed to have a month left. I don't understand....."

>"It's metastasized; it's in the bloodstream. I'm very sorry, but it's just a matter of time now." He adjusted his glasses.

>Wesley spoke up, his voice grave. "Should we have her moved? To the hospital perhaps?"

>The older doctor shook his head. "Moving her now would only cause her unnecessary pain. I gave her some morphine and I'll leave a little more with you, for later. Make her comfortable..." He looked into the living room where Allen was playing with his toy truck. "Let her spend the time with her little boy. Like I said, it won't be long."

>Cordelia cleared her throat. "Thank you, Dr. Pressman. I'll...um...see you out." She and the doctor walked towards the elevator.

>"Thanks", Angel called out just before they were out of earshot. He

closed his eyes. "Tell me that I did the right thing here, Wesley."

>"Taking Bridget and her son in? Easy. It was the right thing to do."

>"Then why do I feel this way?"

>Wesley took a breath. "Because you care about her? Angel, you knew this day would come. From that first day in the office, you knew you'd have to go through this eventually."

>"I thought I could handle it." He opened his eyes again. "I can't even count how many people I've seen die, Wesley. But they were all quick. Well...except for the torturings. None of them, however, were drawn out like this. This is something different. And I don't know if I can watch it."

>"Doesn't much matter at this point what you think you can or can't do, Angel. You made a choice to do what you thought was right. And it brought you here." He shrugged. "That's life."

>Cordelia rejoined them, a small bag in her hands. "Here's the morphine. Dr. Pressman says to keep it out of Allen's reach."

>"I'll put it in the kitchen." Angel took the medicine. "Are you two....can you stay?"

>Wesley and Cordelia exchanged a look. "We can stay", Wesley replied.

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>Bridget stared up at the ceiling. She could feel tears slip out of the corners of her eyes, wetting the pillow that cushioned her head. And she could hear every word that was being spoken just outside the room. She tried to swallow, but her throat stuck. It was so dry. Everything was so dry. Everything took too much energy. And the pain....she hoped the morphine would kick in soon.

>But she was ready for it. She had spent the last month getting ready for it. Every minute had been with Allen, making memories that, with any luck, he would never forget. And Angel had been there, by her side, cooking and cleaning when she became too weak to help. Never, in her whole life, all twenty-four years of it, had someone been there for her like that. She closed her eyes. Now, she could only hope he would still be there for Allen.

>There was movement over her. She slowly opened her eyes again to see who it was. Angel's face looked down at her.

>"Hey", she managed to say. Her attempt to pull herself up would have failed if Angel hadn't helped. When she was sitting upright, she asked, "Where's Allen?"

>"He's playing. Do you want me to get him?" She nodded. "All right...I'll be right back." Angel left the room, returning just a moment later, Allen in his arms. So small against Angel's broad chest. Bridget gathered her strength and reached for him.

>"Mummy", he said in his tiny Irish accent. He let himself be wrapped up in her arms; his little cheek pressed against the Celtic cross she wore around her neck. "Are you okay? Did the doctor make you all better?"

>She kissed his soft black curls, so much like his father's. "No, baby. But don't you worry, you hear? Everything is going to be fine. I promise. Do you believe me?" He nodded. "I love you more than anything in the world. You know that, don't you?"

>He nodded again. "I love you, Mummy."

>Tears she thought had long dried up welled up. She shook her head. "Angel...I can't....please....I can't..."

>Angel swallowed. "Allen, why don't you go ask Miss Cordelia to get you some cookies? Tell her they're on top of the fridge, okay?"

>Allen lifted his head from Bridget's chest. His little body slid off the big bed. "Bye, Mummy", he said before heading off for his treat.

>"Bye, baby", she whispered. "Oh Mary, Mother of God....why is this happening, Angel?"

>He took her hand as he sat on the edge of the bed. "I can't answer that. But I have to believe there's a higher purpose. Or something like it."

>She chuckled. "God's plan, eh? If it's God's plan that I die, right here....very soon..." She stopped as a sob tore through her throat. "...then what is his plan for Allen?"

>"I wish I could tell you."

>Bridget looked down at her hand, covered almost entirely by his. "I may not know God's plan...but I know what I want for Allen." She glanced back up at Angel. "I want you to keep him."

>Angel drew in an unnecessary breath of air. "Bridget....I...I'm honored that you would trust me with taking care of Allen. But....I can't. I'm sorry."

>"Please Angel." Her other hand went over his. "I can't go without knowing what's to become of my son. He's everything to me....the only thing I have from the only man I've ever loved. You cared a great deal about Francis. I know you can care for his son."

>"Bridget...I'm a 253 year old vampire. Allen needs someone who can be there for him....at PTA meetings and...and school plays and....daytime activities. I don't exactly fit the bill."

>"What about the demon? You told me Francis was half demon. Well....it doesn't take a very smart person to realize...that makes Allen a quarter demon. If after I die, he gets adopted or something, how will his new family react to that? You're the only one who can raise him."

>Angel looked up at the ceiling. "Doyle's demon side didn't show until he was...." He stopped. Did he really want to win this argument? Bridget's hand was warm against his. But he knew that very soon, that warm skin would be as cold as his own. His head turned; out of the corner of his eye he could just make out Allen, eating cookies at his kitchen table. "All right."

>"You'll keep him? Really and truly?"

>His fingers intertwined with hers. "I will. If it's what you want."

>"Oh thank you", she whispered, closing her eyes with relief. "Thank you."

>"I believe it's what Doyle would want, too."

>Bridget opened her eyes a minute later. "Do you believe in heaven, Angel?"

>He shifted slightly. "Well, I know for sure that there's a hell. So it only makes sense that there should be a heaven."

>"I think there is. I think that in heaven, you get to have everything you didn't get on earth." She paused. "In heaven, Francis will love me."

>"But, Doyle did..."

>She shook her head. "Did he ever mention me?" Angel had no answer. "I never wanted to believe that love could be one sided." She shrugged. "It can. But in heaven....he'll love me as much as I loved him." A sharp pain radiated from her breast, spreading out through her body. Every muscle grew taut.

>"Bridget?" Her fingers tightened around his.

>The pain began to fade, but didn't go away completely. Hot and

heavy, it pressed into her, reaching into every part of her small frame. "So much for the doctor's morphine", she hissed, through clenched teeth.

>"Wesley?", Angel called out. It only took a second for him to appear in the doorway. "Could you get some more of the morphine and a glass of water?" Wesley headed to the kitchen. "It's going to be okay. I promise."

>Bridget nodded tightly. "I believe you."

>Wesley came back with the bag and a glass. Angel shook a white pill into his hand and fed it to Bridget. Her hand shook as she swallowed from the glass. "Is there anything else I can do?", Wesley asked.

>Bridget smiled through the pain. "You've done....so much for me in the past month. Thank you."

>Wesley looked off to the right. "It was my great pleasure, Miss Roche." He cleared his throat. "Excuse me", he said, before leaving the room.

>"He's done a lot for me.....but nowhere near what you have, Angel." Bridget relaxed a little as the pain lessened. A moment later it was back, in full force. "Oh God!", she cried out.

>In a second, Cordelia and Wesley ran into the room. "Bridget?", Cordelia asked, frantically. "Oh my god..."

>"Mummy?", Allen said. He appeared between Cordelia and Wesley's legs, remnants of cookie on his tiny lips.

>Angel looked his assistants. "Take him out of here." Cordelia took Allen's chubby hand, leading him and Wesley out of the room.

>"Make it stop, Angel", Bridget cried.

>He felt hot tears spring up. "How can I?" Her gaze strayed to the bag of morphine, resting on the bedspread. Realizing, he shook his head. "No...no, I can't. I can't kill you, Bridget."

>"I want this....I want to go with a little...dignity." Her voice cracked with weakness. "You won't be depriving me...of a long....and happy life...Angel. Please..."

>Slowly, almost without thinking, Angel picked up the bag. He emptied the contents into his hand. Nine small white pills. Enough grams to put her to sleep peacefully and eternally. Wasn't he here to help people? Didn't that include alleviating suffering...in whatever form it came in? He made up his mind.

>"Open your mouth", he whispered. She nodded and complied. One by one, Angel placed the pills onto her tongue. She swallowed each with sip of water. Her face grew more peaceful as the pills disappeared.

>And when they were all taken, she closed her eyes and smiled. "Thank you....my angelic vampire."

>*****

>It was Wesley who found Angel, three hours later, holding Bridget's limp, pale hand, the bag of medicine and the glass of water empty. It was Wesley who didn't say anything as he threw the bag away.

>It was Cordelia who called the police to alert the coroner's office. It was Cordelia who let them in when they arrived with the body bag.

>But it was Angel who took Allen aside when his mother's body was carried out of the apartment. And it was Angel who told the little boy what it all meant.

>And when the coroner was gone, and the reports had been filed, and Cordelia headed upstairs to make funeral arrangements, Angel sat alone on his bed. In one hand he held the framed picture Cordelia had made after her first vision, a reminder of Doyle. In the other hand,

careful to only touch the silver necklace, he held Bridget's Celtic cross.

>There was so much he didn't know, so much that it was too late to find out about. Why had these two people come into his life only to leave right away? And their connection to each other, sufficient to create another human being, but not strong enough to survive distance...why had it been that way? Would they finally be together now? Was it possible to find peace through death? That was something he would never get to discover.

>Movement at the door to his bedroom brought Angel back to reality. He looked up and saw Wesley watching him.

>"Allen's asleep on the couch", Wesley said. "Poor little chap...I don't think he understands any of it."

>Angel nodded. "It didn't seem to register when I told him. Maybe with time..." He paused. "Wesley, I know that you know what I did..."

>Wesley held up his hand. "It's not my place to judge your actions, Angel. So, don't ask me to."

>"One more body for my record", Angel said, flatly.

>The former Watcher cleared his throat. "If that's all she was to you, then maybe you didn't do the right thing. But from where I'm standing, I'm pretty certain that you did. I'll see you in the morning, Angel." When his boss didn't reply, Wesley turned and left in silence.

>Angel sat for another long minute before setting the picture and the necklace aside. Rising to his feet, he headed into the living room. Just as Wesley said, Allen lay on his side on the couch, tucked into a tiny fetal position. Angel picked up a blanket from the chaise lounge and unfolded it, gently covering Bridget's son. He stirred, but didn't wake.

>Angel knelt next to the couch and watched the sleeping child. He could see Doyle there. Behind the closed lids, he knew there were the same blue eyes. The nose, so small now would one day be identical to his father's. And his hair, childishly messy though it was, was Doyle's hair.

>"I hope that wherever you are, my friend, you can see him", Angel said outloud. "I think you'd be very proud."

>"Angel", Cordelia's voice floated down from the top of the stairs that led to the office. "There's someone here to see you."

>His head turned. Standing on the step below Cordelia was Kate. "Kate", he said, his voice neutral. "What can I do for you?"

>She began to descend the stairs. "I heard what happened here on the police scanner. You know I have a vested interest in what goes on at Angel Investigations."

>"That's my cue to leave. Goodnight, Angel", Cordelia said, quickly turning and disappearing from view.

>Angel stood up. "I didn't think you cared anymore, Kate."

>"When a human dies in your apartment, I want to know about it", she replied, emphasizing the word "human". Seeing the look on his face, she softened a bit. "But since it turns out she didn't die from anything supernatural, I wanted to offer my condolences." She approached him. "Who was she?"

>"Just a friend. Look, it's been a rough night. So, if that's all you came to do..."

>She put her hands on her hips. "I am trying, Angel. Do you know how much it took for me to come here at all?"

>"The last time we spoke, you made it perfectly clear how you felt

about things. I haven't changed, Kate. I'm still a vampire. So, why are you really here?"

>"I told you...to offer my condolences."

>Angel crossed his arms. "You didn't even know Bridget. There's something more. I want to know what it is."

>Kate stared at the floor for a second. "It's the little boy. Something has to be done about him. I assume there's no one...."

>"No. There's no one else. And something has been done about him. He'll be staying with me."

>"You can't do that, Angel. Even you must know that. There are procedures for orphans...foster care, possible adoption." She sighed. "It's not pleasant, but it's the way things are done."

>"When there's no other option. There's an option here, Kate. Allen is staying with me."

>She looked into his eyes for the first time since her father's death. "Do you know what you're doing, Angel? Taking care of a child is the biggest responsibility you can sign up for. What kind of life can you give him? I mean, the surroundings alone aren't exactly ideal. Perpetual darkness, medieval weaponry on the walls....a guardian who's work has the dangerous potential of coming home with him?"

>"You think I would let something happen to a four year old boy?"

>"I think that there's the possibility that you wouldn't be able to stop it, yeah. Not to mention what will happen when he starts to grow up. How are you going to explain why you can't ever pick him up from school or play football with him in the park on a sunny afternoon...or why he grows and gets older and you don't. Or why...."

>"Kate", Angel interrupted her. "I am the only one who can take care of this child. End of discussion. I think you can show yourself out."

>She stood for another minute staring at him. "Fine. I'll go." She started for the stairs. "But think about it, Angel. And don't be surprised when these things come to the surface."

>Angel waited until he heard the door slam, signaling that she was gone. He ran both hands through his hair and kneeled back down next to Allen. "She's wrong. I can protect you." He reached out and touched one of Allen's curls. "I have to protect you."

>*****

>"Cordelia!" Angel pushed aside the elevator's grate and stepped into his apartment. "Cordelia?"

>"I'm right here, Angel", she replied, her voice muffled by the couch. Groggily, she stood up so he could see her. "And if you wake Allen up with all of that yelling, I swear I will stake you. I just got him to sleep twenty minutes ago."

>Angel looked at his watch. "It's almost one. Is he sick?"

>Cordelia stretched then shook her head. "No. Just wired." She paused. "He asked about Bridget again."

>"What did you say?"

>"I didn't know what to say. 'Your mom's been dead for two months; get the hint' seemed a bit harsh for a four year old. I just gave him a cookie. Which could explain why he was wired..." She shrugged. "Did you get the bad guy?"

>"I think it was female. But yes, I got it." He took off his coat. "I appreciate you staying with him on such short notice. I hope you didn't have anything...big planned for the evening."

>She picked up her bag and slung it across her chest. "Trust me, if I had, it would have been Uncle Wesley's turn to babysit. But, you know, I could start charging you....."

>Angel smiled. "Goodnight Cordelia."

>"See you on Monday." She closed herself into the elevator shaft. It rose, carrying her out of the apartment.

>Throwing his coat over the back of the couch, Angel walked into the makeshift bedroom Wesley had helped him create for Allen. Though it was no more than a curtained off area of the living room with a glorified cot for a bed, the little boy treated it as though it were his own private fort. He lay, tucked in up to his chin, eyes closed in peaceful sleep. Angel watched him for a second, before turning to head to his room. Allen's little voice stopped him.

>"Angel, where's Mummy?"

>He turned back around. Allen still lay in his cot, but he was wide awake. "You should be sleeping", he lightly scolded. "Close your eyes and go back to sleep."

>"I want to see Mummy."

>Angel swallowed thickly. "Kiddo...you can't do that. Remember when we took the car ride to the cemetery that one night? I showed you the headstone with her name on it?" The little boy nodded. "Well, that's where your mother is now. So, you can't see her anymore. Ever."

>"Father is dead. Is Mummy with him?" Allen looked up at Angel.

>"I hope so." Angel sat on the edge of the cot. "Do you understand what it means to be dead?"

>Allen didn't answer. "Why did Mummy have to die?"

>"She was very sick, Allen. She didn't want to die, but she couldn't help it." He cleared his throat. "Enough questions. It's time to go back to sleep." He stood up.

>"Angel?" Allen sat up. "Will you die, too?"

>Angel looked at the ceiling. "No, kiddo. I promise you....I won't die, too. Now, goodnight."

>"Angel?"

>"What is it, Allen?" His tone was a shade sterner.

>The little boy held his arms out towards Angel. He stared at them for a second, unsure of exactly what to do. Very uncomfortable, he sat back down and stiffly hugged the child.

>"Go to sleep." After a half second pause, he ruffled the dark curls on Allen's head. "I'll see you in the morning."

>For the first time since Bridget's death, Angel didn't wait until Allen fell asleep before he left his side.

>*****

>"This is getting ridiculous!" Lindsey slammed a thick file onto his desk. "This makes how many of our longest running clients taken out by Angel?"

>Lilah poured two fingers of brandy into a glass. "I've lost count." She drank. "It's time to finally do something about this little...problem we seem to be having over and over again."

>Lindsey put his hands on his hips. "What do you suggest?"

>"Let's see...what choices do we have? Bribery? Assassination?" Lilah swirled the remaining liquor around in the glass. "Or something else....."

>"And that something else would be...?" He sat down behind the desk.

>Lilah set her glass down and stood up. "Do you remember the first

thing you were told when you got this job?"

>"Of course. Win at all costs." Lindsey leaned forward. "What do you think I've been trying to do?"

>"That was lesson number two. Lesson one was that everyone has something they value above anything else. Make sure you find out what that one thing is for everyone you come up against."

>Lindsey stared at her for a second. "So, we find out what Angel cares the most about...."

>"And we threaten it", Lilah finished. "Cheaper than bribery and less mess than assasination."

>"Question." Lindsey held up one index finger. "How do you propose we delve into the emotions of a soul-cursed vampire?"

>Lilah smiled. "I'll take care of it. You just be ready to tell the good news to the senior partners." She picked her drink up and drained the rest of it. "Give me forty-eight hours and a surveillance team and all our problems will be solved."

>"You're a truly sinister woman." Lindsey chuckled. "I think you enjoy this way too much."

>"Of course I enjoy it." Lilah opened the office door on her way out. "You don't think I stay here for the dental plan, do you?"

>*****

>"A....B...C...D..." Allen stopped, his little finger under the "E".

>"Go on", Angel prodded him. "You're doing very well."

>Allen gave a tiny sigh. "E....F...G....can have a piggyback ride?"

>"Allen. You know that this is lesson time. Now, let see if we can get to 'K'." He pointed to the "H". "What's next?"

>"Piggyback ride." Allen folded his small arms with as much stubbornness as he could muster.

>Angel looked down at the boy with more amusement than annoyance. "You want a piggyback ride, do you?" Allen nodded emphatically. "All right then..." With one fluid motion, Angel picked Allen up and swung him on his back. The little boy squealed with delight. "We're going on a piggyback ride."

>"On a piggyback ride", Allen repeated. He grabbed handfuls of Angel's black shirt to hold on as his guardian set out across the apartment.

>"Where are we going, Master Allen? Zimbabwe? Afghanistan?"

>"Ireland", Allen replied.

>Angel stopped in his tracks. "You want to go to Ireland." He felt Allen nod his head against his back. "You wouldn't settle for Disneyland, would you?"

>"I'm for it", Cordelia said from behind. Angel spun around quickly and Allen giggled. "There's a telephone call for you upstairs, Angel."

>He walked over to her and shook Allen off into her arms. "I'll be right back, kiddo."

>Angel took the steps two at a time until he was back in his office. "Hello", he answered after he picked the phone up.

>"Angel", a vaguely familiar female voice said. "Do you remember me? Lilah Morgan."

>His mood instantly plummeted. "I remember. What do you want?"

>"That's hardly friendly, Angel", Lilah scolded.

>"We're not friends. What do you want?"

>He heard Lilah delicately clear her throat. "Rumor has it that you have a houseguest."

>Angel was surprised, but managed to keep it out of his voice. "So, we can safely add spying to the list of crimes whimsically committed by the lawyers of Wolfram and Hart", he said, sitting down at his desk. "Tell me how this relates to what you want."

>"A man who gets straight to the point. I could get used that."

>"Don't bother."

>She laughed and ignored his comment. "The little boy, Allen Doyle Roche. Only son of Bridget Kathleen-Calia Roche, who recently passed away from breast cancer after coming to America from Northern Ireland."

>"What about him?"

>"I assume all of little Allen's paperwork is in order?"

>Angel's brow furrowed. "Paperwork?"

>"For long-term citizenship. He will be staying in America, correct?"

>"Yes, but..."

>Lilah interrupted him. "Good, because right now, I have him down as an English citizen of Northern Ireland. If he didn't have his papers, I'm afraid I'd have to report this to the INS."

>"What are you getting at?" Angel's voice was threatening.

>"You're a smart man, Angel. You figure it out."

>Angel paused. "The INS wouldn't deport him. He's a four year old child."

>"And as of right now, an illegal alien. The government can be so picky about things like this. Elian Gonzalez is in the same position...that could be little Allen in no time flat."

>"That boy had a father back in Cuba. Allen has no family in Ireland", Angel countered, confidently.

>The sound of papers rustling came through the phone line. "You're sure about that? Because I'm fairly confident that my information is correct. There is a grandmother, Kathleen O' Connell Roche who lives in the country town of Downpatrick. A widow, she's been alone for six years, ever since her daughter, Bridget moved to Belfast. She's a very lonely lady, Angel. Imagine her delight at finding out she has a..."

>"Why don't you just come out and say it. You want me to...what? Get a day job? Stay home and watch Jeopardy! and Letterman every night? Or else you're going to have Allen sent to his grandmother in Ireland."

>"Well, I was going to simply say 'lay off our clients or we'll have the brat deported', but I like the way you put it better." There was a long pause. "We'll give you a day or two to think it over. You know where to reach me." A click on the other end told Angel she had hung up.

>Angrily, Angel slammed the receiver back into the cradle. He sensed someone jump at the motion. It was Wesley; he stood in the doorway to the office's lobby. "Can they really send Allen back to Ireland?", he asked his boss.

>Angel ran his fingers through his hair. "If they were properly motivated, yeah. They could."

>Wesley tentatively entered the office. "Maybe...just maybe...that wouldn't be such a bad thing, Angel."

>"What?"

>"Now hear me out." Wesley held up his hands. "I've been watching you for the past two months, very closely. I see the way you are with the boy. You love him. More than I think you can let yourself admit."

>Angel twisted the Clagdaggh ring around his finger. "Maybe I do. What does that matter?"

>"It matters a great deal, Angel. Or maybe I should say Angelus. Because if things keep on in this manner, that's exactly who you're going to be." Wesley put his palms on the desk and leaned towards Angel, intensity in his expression. "Happiness isn't purely sexual. It comes in other forms. One day, you could be fixing Allen his breakfast and *wham*!" He smacked the desk for emphasis. "There goes your soul!!"

>"It'd never let that happen. You know that I would *never* let that happen."

>"It's been my experience that happiness has a tendency of sneaking up and surprising one when they least expect it. According to Giles' diaries, the first thing you did after you turned in Sunnydale was to go after the thing that brought you happiness. Buffy."

>Angel stood up. "You don't have to tell me, Wesley. I was there."

>"Buffy is a Slayer. She could defend herself. Allen is little boy. Completely innocent and totally defenseless. He'd last maybe a minute. Two if you were feeling particurally forgiving, but I doubt..."

>"Wesely."

>"I'm sorry. That was a bit harsh. But I only say it because..."

>"You're right."

>Wesley blinked. "I am? About which part?"

>Angel stared at the closed blinds on the window, his back to the English man. "All of it." He faced him again. "Allen makes me happier than I've felt in two years. Crayons on the floor, disgusting blue fruit drinks in the fridge, Saturday morning cartoons..." Angel crossed his arms. "Piggyback rides....the unconditional love and trust...I need it all."

>"But is it worth risking your soul? Worth risking all the good you do here?"

>"I don't know." Angel looked back out the window. He could feel the sun beginning to set outside. "I thought I took Allen in to protect him. Protect him because I couldn't protect his father. But now..." He paused. "I'll never have a child, Wesley. Never. I could live another 250 years, but I will never be a father to anyone. Except Allen." He choked. "I want to be his father."

>Wesley moved towards him. "I understand, Angel..."

>"No, you don't understand!", Angel raised his voice. "How could you possibly understand? You can be a father, Wesley. You could go out and meet a girl tonight, fall in love with her, get married and have a son or a daughter. I'll never get to have that! Allen is my last chance. If he goes..." Angel stopped, suddenly too tired to keep up his anger. "If he goes, I lose it all."

>"If he stays, you lose your soul."

>A long moment of silence followed. "Wesley, can you do something for me?", Angel asked finally.

>The former Watcher cleared his throat. "What is it?"

>"Try to contact Allen's grandmother. Her name is Kathleen Roche and she lives in Downpatrick. Tell her..." He stopped. "You know what to tell her."

>"I do. I'll get right on it." Wesley headed for the door. "For what it's worth, Angel, you're doing the right thing. Again."

>Angel nodded. "Good. Because it hurts like hell."

>*****

>Cordelia turned off the oven's heat and slammed the pan of brownies onto the stovetop to cool. "He's just going to put Allen on a plane and ship him back to Ireland? Isn't that a bit, oh...I don't know...stupid?!"

>Wesley took his index finger from the laptop before him and put it to his lips. "Lower your voice. Allen is just in the living room."

>She complied, half-heartedly. "What happened? He loves having Allen here. Why would he want to give him up?"

>"He doesn't really have a choice. Wolfram and Hart tried to blackmail him, to get him to stop killing their clients. If he makes the decision to send Allen to his grandmother on his own, then the lawyers lose their advantage..."

>"And the dark avenger rides on. Yeah, I got that part. But Angel loves this kid. I refuse to believe that he could just give him away without a fight." Cordelia threw her oven mitt into the sink.

>"Well....he is...", Wesley typed for a moment. "Ah-ha!", he cried, triumphantly. "I'm in."

>Cordelia looked at the laptop's screen from over his shoulder. "What are you in? And when did Angel get a laptop?"

>"I've managed to get into the Department of Records for Northern Ireland. I'm trying to get a telephone number for Allen's grandmother." He ran his finger over the small pad that served as a mouse. "All right...here's Downpatrick..." He highlighted the city's name and clicked the mouse, scrolling down when a long list of names appeared on the screen. A second passed. "That's funny."

>"What's funny?" Cordelia returned to her brownie pan.

>"There's no listing for a Kathleen Roche."

>Cordelia pulled a knife from a drawer and began to cut the brownies. "Maybe she has an unlisted number."

>"No...every citizen is here, even the ones without phone numbers." Wesley frowned at the screen. "Let me check something..." The sound of a mouse clicking filled the room, still not managing to mask the cartoon sounds from the next room over. "Oh dear", Wesley said, eventually.

>Knife still in hand, Cordelia approached him. "What's wrong?"

>Wesley pointed to the screen. "Take a look at that."

>She bent down to read. "It's a death certificate. So?"

>"Look closer."

>"October 1, 1998....Kathleen O'Connell Roche." Cordelia swallowed. "Emphasyema."

>Wesley pushed his chair back away from the table and stood up. "So, they lied. Allen has no grandmother in Ireland."

>"But this is good. It means Allen can stay here with us." When he didn't reply, Cordelia continued, "Right?"

>"There's still the problem of Angel finding contentment and happiness through Allen. We cannot allow that to happen", Wesley mused.

>Cordelia took a plate and placed the cut brownie squares onto it. "Maybe we can find some way of making Angel so unhappy that it'll balance out his warm fuzzy feelings about Allen. For example....we can invite Buffy to L.A. for, like, a week. Or..." She stopped as a blinding pain hit her forehead. The brownie plate fell to the floor and shattered.

>Wesley rushed forward and held her up as the vision ripped through her body and mind. When it was over, he asked, "What is it?"

>Cordelia's breath was heavy; her eyes were full of fear as she looked at him. "I saw us."

>He pulled back a little. "What?"

>"There's something upstairs, Wesley. Something very bad. It's coming for us", she whispered. "We have to get Allen out of here. Now!"

>"But...but...where's Angel?"

>Cordelia grabbed her bag from the back of one of the kitchen chairs. "On one of his long sewer walks. C'mon! We do not have a lot of time here!!" She ran into the living room. Allen sat on the floor, Indian style. On the television, an anvil fell on Wiley Coyote. "Allen, we're going to go for a little walk, okay?" Cordelia reached for the boy.

>"Where are we going?", he asked, taking her hand.

>"To find Angel", she replied. Across the room, Wesley found the trapdoor that led to the sewers and opened it. On instinct, he reached for a battle axe that hung on Angel's wall. No sooner did he have it in his hand, than there was a pounding on the door to the office. Cordelia pulled Allen closer to her body and silently thanked herself for having locked it.

>Wesley stepped in front of them. "Whatever comes through that door, I want you to get Allen out of here."

>"But you could be hurt!!"

>"Don't worry about me....I'll be....." The door at the top of the stairs burst open and a large demon stepped inside. He roared, the deep rumbling echoed through the apartment. "...fine", Wesley quietly finished. "Cordelia.....go!!!"

>The demon let out another cry and jumped off the stairs, landing only a few feet away from them. Wesley brandished the axe, with as much menace as he could muster. "Leave here!", he commanded. "Do not make me have to prove my competency with this weapon!" His words had no effect; the demon advanced on them.

>"What now?", Cordelia yelled. "I'm not leaving you here by yourself!"

>"Take Allen out of here!", he replied. With all his might, he swung the axe at the demon. It easily sidestepped the blade and grabbed onto the wooden handle, pulling Wesley across the room with it. A flick of the demon's wrist and Wesley was sent careening across the room, landing unconscious on the floor.

>The demon still held onto the axe, but he tossed it away as though it were nothing more than one of Allen's toys. He snarled and turned his attention back to the little boy. Cordelia felt Allen pull away from her skirt. "Allen....don't!!", she cried out, but the boy didn't seem to hear her. Calmly and determinedly, he faced their attacker.

>"You hurt him", Allen told the demon, matter of factly. Suddenly, the little boy morphed; blue-green spikes sprung out all over his face. Cordelia's eyes flew open in shock, but it didn't appear to surprise Allen at all. "Don't hurt my friends."

>The demon cocked his horned head to the side in confusion. He stared down at the little boy and Allen stared right back up at him. His now red eyes were unblinking, set back amidst the dangerous looking appendages.

>Just then, Cordelia felt something grab her leg. She screamed and kicked the hand away. Looking down at the floor, she saw Angel pulling himself up through the trapdoor. "Oh thank god!! There's a demon here!! Kill it, Angel!!"

>Angel rose to his feet and surveyed the scene. Wesley lay crumpled on the floor across the room. A large Trea 'lion demon stood before

him. But the most amazing thing, the thing that would have made Angel's heart speed up if it had been possible, was Allen, in full Bracken demon face, squaring off with the Trea 'lion. He didn't have time to process it all. The demon, apparently tired of being held in check by a four year old child, let out another roar and ran for them.

>Relying on his super advanced reflexes, Angel vamped out, ducked and made a quick grab for the axe. When it was in his hand, he swung it, making direct contact with the demon's neck. A spatter of blood patterned the wall as the demon's head detached from his shoulders. The body dropped with a thud.

>Cordelia put one hand over her heart. "That was *way* too close for comfort!" She rushed forward to Wesley, who was beginning to stir.

>Angel looked down at Doyle's son, wonder etched onto his vampiric features. He quickly shook himself back to normal and kneeled down to the boy's level. "Allen.....what...how?"

>"I'm different....aren't I, Angel?" Allen's voice was small; it didn't match up with his demon face.

>"Yeah, kiddo. You are." Angel took the boy into his arms and rocked him gently. "You really, really are."

>*****

>Cordelia set the phone down. "Well, it's official. Allen has absolutely no one in Ireland willing to take him in." She folded her hands and leaned forward eagerly. "Does that mean we get to keep him?"

>Angel propped his chin up on his knuckles. "This from the person who three months ago wanted nothing to do with Doyle's children."

>She looked down at her desk. "Well...I was wrong." When she looked up, she saw the surprise on Wesley and Angel's faces. "I can admit that I'm wrong when I have to!"

>Wesley smiled as much as he could through the bruise where his face had hit the floor. "I had a feeling you could, all along."

>"So, what do we do now? Do you think those demons will send another...thing?", Cordelia asked. "Because I'd like to be at the beach if at all possible."

>Angel shook his head. "The demon was retribution, for when I killed the other one awhile back. I don't think they'll try it again." He stood. "We have a larger problem though. Allen."

>"Where's the problem? He has no one, he's comfortable with us....he should stay here." Cordelia was firm.

>"Two words", Wesley replied, lifting his healing glass of whiskey. "Perfect happiness."

>Cordelia sighed. "Don't you think you're jumping the gun just a tad? I mean, it took the full monty to make him Killer-boy with Buffy. Allen is a really different situation."

>"It's not a risk I care to take, Cordelia." Angel walked for a few steps. "Besides, there's a new factor now. His demon side."

>"I can't believe that happened. Didn't you say that Doyle said his demonness didn't show until he was, like, twenty? And he was half. Allen is only half of...a half."

>Angel shrugged. "Genetics, the threatening situation...any number of things could explain his early transformation. Whatever it was, it's there now. And it's not going to go away. And..." He sighed. "...he'll never have a normal life. Not like his father had, anyways."

>"All the more reason why we should take him in", Cordelia concluded.
"We do demons in case you had forgotten."

>"You're not going to be grasping the soul-loss concept anytime soon, are you?" Wesley took a swig of liquor.

>Cordelia was about to retort when the phone rang. Instead, she threw him a withering look and answered. "Angel Investigations, we help the hopeless." There was a pause. "Hold on." She put her hand over the mouthpiece. "You'll probably want to take this, Angel."

>Angel took the reciever from her. "Hello."

>"I imagine you've had ample time to think things over." Lilah's voice slid through the line.

>"Why did I have a feeling you'd be calling today?" Angel grimaced.

>"I wouldn't know. Maybe it has something to do with that little surprise one of our clients sent to your apartment last night."

>"That was....?" He shook his head. "I should have known. That had Wolfram and Hart stamped all over it."

>Lilah laughed. "Wolfram and Hart, of course, denies any and all knowledge of..."

>Angel moved the phone from his ear. After a minute, he put it back and yawned loudly. "Sorry, must have nodded off there. Is the standard disclaimer over or can I settle in for a nap?"

>Her voice hardened. "Look, have you made your decision or not? One phone call from me and the little brat gets a one way ticket home."

>It was Angel's turn to laugh. "Oh...I don't think so."

>"What do you mean?"

>"Word of advice...the next time you try to blackmail someone, get your flunkies to do a bit more research. Especially in the death certificate arena. It would be a shame if the only card you had to play died two years ago from emphasyema, wouldn't it?" Another long pause followed. "Well, I imagine you've had ample time to think *that* over. Always a pleasure doing business with Wolfram and Hart." With that, Angel slammed the phone back into its cradle.

>"Smartly done." Wesley saluted the vampire with his whiskey glass. "Now, what to do about Allen? Any thoughts?"

>"More than just a thought." Angel rubbed the back of his neck. "I know what I have to do."

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>It only took Angel five minutes to pack Allen's things into the duffel bag Bridget had carried in the office on that first day. Could it really have only been three months earlier? The bag had held almost everything his mother had owned in the world. Into it, Angel put Allen's tiny shirts and jeans, along with his toys: his dump truck, his action figures and his coloring book, along with a box of well-worn crayons.

>When the bag was full, Angel sat down on Allen's cot and put his head in his hands. He stayed that way for what seemed like hours, until he felt small fingers touch his. Looking up, he saw Allen standing in front of him.

>"Hey kiddo", he said.

>Allen looked down at his tiny shoes. "I don't want to go, Angel."

>Angel forced himself to smile. "You're going to be very happy, Allen. The people you're going to live with are good people. And they'll take good care of you."

>"I want to stay here with you!"

>"I know." Angel looked up at the ceiling and blinked rapidly. "But

these people know how to take care of you. They're just like you...they're your father's people."

>The little boy's eyes became liquid blue. "Will you come visit me, Angel?"

>"If I can, kiddo. If I can." He paused. "Come here...I have something I want to give you."

>Allen followed Angel into his bedroom. From a drawer, Angel pulled out Bridget's cross by its chain. "Take good care of this, Allen. Your mother would want you to always wear it." Carefully, he dropped the necklace over Allen's black curls. It settled around his little neck; the cross hung almost to his belly button.

>Kneeling to Allen's level, Angel touched one of those curls. "I'm going to miss you. Very, very much."

>The little boy threw his arms around Angel's neck and held on tight. "I love you, Angel."

>He could feel the heat of the cross as it touched his chest through his shirt. It matched the heat of the tears that threatened to fall. Without hesitation, he returned the hug, holding onto the little boy for a long moment. "I...I love you too, Allen."

>There was movement at the door. "Angel", Cordelia whispered. She sounded as though she might burst into tears at any moment. "They're here."

>Gently, Angel pulled away. "Time to go." He took Allen's hand and together they walked back into the living room. Standing at the bottom of the stairs were two Bracken demons.

>Angel and Allen walked to them. "This is Allen", Angel told them. "Allen...these are the people you're going to be staying with."

>The male Bracken bent down and smiled at the boy. "Hello, Allen. I'm Francis."

>Allen put his finger in his mouth, shyly. "My daddy's name was Francis."

>"Well then....we're off to a good start already." Francis straightened.

>Angel held out his hand to the demon. "I appreciate you doing this for us. For him."

>He shook it, hesitantly at first. "It's not a problem at all. I'm glad you caught us before we left town. You know, we're the last Brackens to leave Los Angeles."

>Wesley stood from his place on the couch. "Where will you go?"

>"To Canada", Francis replied. "Others of our kind live there; we'll join them. The threat of the Scourge is less there." He looked down at Allen. "He'll be safe with us. I give you my word."

>"He had better be", Cordelia piped up. "That's one special kid you're getting." She approached Allen and kneeled, hugging the boy. "Remember what I told you?"

>"Never wear brown and black together and plaid is bad", Allen repeated from memory. Cordelia grinned, despite the tears that tumbled down her cheeks.

>Wesley joined them and ruffled the hair on Allen's head. "Be a good boy, Allen."

>"I will, Wesley."

>During this, Angel retrieved Allen's duffel bag. He handed it to Francis. "I think that's everything."

>Francis nodded. "We had better get going." He took Allen's hand.

>Allen pulled away and ran to Angel; his little face pressed against the vampire's black pants. "Goodbye Angel."

>Angel picked him up, holding him tightly. "Goodbye." He kissed

Allen's curls before putting him back down.

>Once more, Francis took Allen's hand and led him up the stairs. Just before they disappeared through the door, Allen waved at Angel. Angel lifted his hand. Then, Allen was gone.

>The trio stood for several long minutes, not saying a word. Finally, Wesley broke the silence. "Well Angel...once again, I believe you have done...."

>Angel cut him off. "Thank you Wesley, but this time, I don't need validation. I know I did the only thing I could." He smiled. "The right thing."

>The End <p><p>

End
file.